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ABSTRACT

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 68 first graders to identify what ideas young readers hold about the reading process. Specifically, the study questioned whether good and poor readers held the same views about how they learned to read, what they and others did as they read, their reading ability, and why people read. The responses of the highest and lowest readers to the interview questions were compared and reported in tabular form. Results showed that, in general, there was more similarity among the high achieving readers' responses than among the responses of the low achievers, and there was some overlapping between the responses of the two groups. Both high and low achievers viewed the reading process as the saying of words. The children differed somewhat, however, in the strategies they would use to say the word. More than one-half of each group said they would sound out the word, and almost a third of the high achievers said that was the only strategy they would use. Nearly one-half of the low achievers credited their mother as the one who taught them to read, while nearly 62% of the high achievers credited their teacher. Finally, almost as many low achieving as high achieving readers said they were good readers. The appendix contains responses to the interview's 13 questions, which were adapted from the Burke Reading Inventory. (HOD)

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HIGH AND LOW ACHIEVING FIRST-GRADE READERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE READING PROCESS

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High and Low Achieving First-Grade Readers' Perceptions of the Reading Process

Most reading research and classroom practices are based on adults' perceptions of the reading process. Until recently, little attention has been given to children's perceptions of what they do as readers and their viewpoints of the reading process. An understanding of readers' viewpoints could be helpful in assisting the child in becoming a good reader.

A number of studies have reported on children's perceptions of various aspects of reading. For instance, Evanecho, Ollila, Downing, and Braun (1973) reported that children's concepts of reading are positively related to their reading achievement. Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) described the differences between children's concepts of reading and those of adults' and identified developmental stages in children's perceptions about reading. Johns and Ellis (1976) found that many children seem to think of reading only as a decoding process.

One of the more intensive studies conducted recently concerning children's perceptions of reading was completed by Bondy (1985). She studied the definitions of reading of low and high achieving first-grade children in one classroom. Through interviews and observations, she collected data to identify definitions the children had constructed about reading and to compare the definitions within and access ability groups. She concluded that poorer readers primarily viewed reading as saying words, as school-work, and as a source of status. On the other hand, she found that the better readers perceived reading as a way to learn things, a private pleasure, and a social activity. The better readers seemed to view reading as a personally

meaningful activity. Bondy pointed out that, of course, some of the same definitions were held by both poor and good readers.

The purpose of the present study was to identify ideas young readers hold about the reading process. Specifically, do good and poor readers hold the same views about how they learned to read, what they and others do as they read, their reading ability, and why people read?

Subjects

The sample for the study consisted of 70 first-grade students who were the five highest readers and the five lowest readers from seven first-grade classrooms. High and low readers were identified by comprehension scores on the Classroom Reading Inventory (Silvoroli, 1984), an informal reading inventory, that was individually administered to all children in the seven classrooms. Two students were eliminated from the study because they were subsequently identified as special education students, leaving a sample of 68 first graders.

The mean ages of the high and low achieving groups were very close: 85.2 months for the high achieving readers (HARs), 84.8 months for the low achieving readers (LARs). The gender composition of both groups was similar: 18 boys and 16 girls in the HAR group, 17 boys and 17 girls in the LAR group. The family status of the groups was slightly different: 64.7% (22) of the HAR group were from homes with two parents (not necessarily natural) while 50.0% (17) of the LAR group were from one parent homes. The average number of siblings for each group was 1.4, HARs and 2.1, LARs. The mean scaled score from the Stanford reading total subtests was 568 (81%ile) for the HARs and 471 (26%ile) for the LARs.

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were scheduled in the school at the classroom teachers' convenience. The time span for each interview ranged from fifteen minutes to more than thirty minutes. The interview was an adaptation of the Burke Reading Inventory (Burke, 1977) and consisted of the following questions:

1. When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?
2. Do you ever do anything else?
3. Who is the best reader in your class?
4. What makes them a good reader?
5. Do you think they ever come to something they don't know when they're reading? What do they do?
6. Who is not a good reader in your class?
7. Why do you think_____is not a good reader?
8. What could you do to help them be a better reader?
9. How did you learn to read?
10. What did your teacher do to help you learn to read?
11. Are you a good reader?
12. How do you know?
13. Why do people read?

Analysis

The responses of the highest and lowest readers to the interview questions were compared and reported in tabular form. Raw scores relative to the total group of 34 HAR and 34 LAR were reported. Some of the responses were reported anecdotally and discussed.

Results of Interviews

The children's responses show both differences and similarities between the two groups. We will report in greater detail the responses to questions which revealed differences. They are: "What do you do when you are reading and come to something you don't know?" (1), "Do you ever do anything else?" (2), "How did you learn to read?" (9) and "Are you a good reader?" (11). The summarized responses to the remaining questions can be seen in the Appendix.

In an effort to probe what children do as readers we asked the question, "What do you do when you are reading and come to something you don't know?" There was only a slight difference between the responses of both groups. "Sound it out" was the response given by 58.8% (20) of the high achievers and by 52.9% (18) of the low achieving readers. "Ask someone" was the strategy reported by 26.5% (9) of the high achievers and by 35.3% (12) of the low achievers. "Skip the word" was not reported by any high achievers, but it was mentioned by 5.9% (2) of the low achievers. No low achievers selected "use meaning" (context), but 11.8% (4) of the high achievers stated that context was their first strategy. Other strategies were mentioned by only 2.9% (1) of the high achievers, "I just know," and 5.9% (2) of the low achievers, "Count on my finger"; "Think".

Following the question about what they do when they come to something they don't know, the children were asked the question, "Do you ever do anything else?" In other words, if your first strategy fails what is your back-up strategy? Of the group that said "Ask someone" and "Use meaning" on the first question, 23.5% (8) of the high achievers said they would then "Sound it out," and 29.4% (10) of the low achievers said they would "Sound it

out." As the back-up strategy, "Use meaning" was stated by 2.9% (1) of the high achievers and 8.8% (3) of the low achievers. Surprisingly, 32.4% (11) of the high achievers and 20.6% (7) of the low achievers said they would not do anything if their first attempt did not produce the right word. Other responses were given by 5.9% (2) of the high achievers, "Imagine an easy word," or "It might be a compound word"; and 20.6% (7) of the low achievers.

Most children in this study credit some person with teaching them to read. However, there were some definite differences between the responses of the high achieving readers and the low achieving readers. When asked, "How did you learn to read?", the classroom teacher was credited with the teaching by 61.8% (21) of the high achievers whereas only 38.2% (13) of the low achievers credited the teachers. The mother was seen as the person who taught them to read by only 17.6% (6) of the high achievers but, surprisingly, 47.1% (16) of the low achievers credited their mothers. Siblings were credited by 5.9% (2) of the high achievers and 8.8% (3) of the low achievers. Only 8.8% (3) of the high achievers and 5.9% (2) of the low achievers thought they had taught themselves to read. No low achievers gave any other person credit for learning, but one of the high achievers said, "My cousin got me books and asked me words;" another high achiever said, "My Texas Instrument computer taught me."

After being asked who was the best reader or readers in their class, the children were asked, "What makes them a good reader?" There were few differences except almost twice as many low achievers (15) as high achievers (8) felt that good readers read fast, read hard materials, and get all the words right.

The follow-up question was, "Do you think they (the good readers) ever come to something they don't know when they're reading?" (5) Over one-third (13) of the low achievers said good readers don't come to words they don't know. Many high achievers said good readers had to "Sound it out"; "Ask the teacher" was the most frequent response by low achievers who believed the good reader did not know all the words.

After being asked the question, "Who is not a good reader in your class?" the student was asked, "Why do you think_____is not a good reader?" The major difference between the two groups' responses centered around the fact that the high achievers cited attention to such things as not listening or not practicing, and several said that poor readers always needed the teacher. The low achievers were more prone to cite specific reading behaviors of the poor readers, such as skipping pages, not putting words together, missing all the words, and reading one word at a time.

Then the students were asked, "What could you do to help them (the poor reader) be a better reader?" The high achievers primarily cited paying attention, listening, watching, reading faster, telling the student the word, and of course, sounding it out. Over a third of the low achievers had no response on how to help the poor reader and those who did respond mentioned sounding it out for them and just telling them the words.

In response to "What did your teacher do to help you learn to read?", no differences were noted except that 5 high achievers stated that they already knew how to read before they came to school.

When asked the question, "Are you a good reader?," there were some interesting results. An overwhelming majority of both groups responded "yes"

to the question: 85.3% (29) of the high achievers and 70.6% (24) of the low achievers. Only 2.9% (1) in each group said they were not good readers. Nine (26.5%) of the low achieving students said they were "sort of good" or "pretty good" while only 5.9% (2) of the high achieving readers responded in this way.

"Are you a good reader?" was followed by the question, "How do you know?" The high achievers were more specific about the reasons, giving such responses as "cause I can read the Bible," "I play Scrabble," "I read fast," and "I read all the words." Over one-third of the low achievers did not respond to the question or said "I don't know". Those who did respond seemed to deal directly with ways they "mess up" or "miss a lot of words."

In response to the question, "Why do people read?" there were differences. The high achievers had more functional responses whereas many of the low achievers gave either no answer or a school reason such as "can go to second grade!" "so can learn to sound words and learn stuff." High achievers gave answers such as, "If you couldn't read danger signs, you might get hurt;" "Grownups need to read because they have to know stuff to do their job" and, "To sign something. If you didn't read, you wouldn't know what it said."

Summary

Most of the children interviewed in this study did have definite notions about reading and the reading process. Although the same reading program was being used in six of the seven classrooms, it was evident that the children had constructed different perceptions about various aspects of reading. In general, there was more similarity among the high achieving reader's responses than among the responses of the low achievers and there was some overlapping between the responses of the two groups.

The major differences in the responses of the two groups were to the following questions:

1) How did you learn to read?

2) What makes_____a good reader?

3) Do you think_____(good reader) ever comes to something they don't know?

4) Why do you think_____is not a good reader?

Discussion

What did we learn about these first graders' views of reading? What questions were raised by the findings? Did the children's responses provide any insights that would aid in classroom instruction?

When asked the question, "When you're reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do?" all 68 children interpreted the "something you don't know" as being a word as opposed to meaning. This indicated to the researchers that these first graders, both high and low achievers, view the reading process as rather simplistic, i.e., a process of saying words. The children differed somewhat, however, in the strategies they would use to say the word. More than one-half of each group said they would "sound out the word" and almost a third of the high achievers said that was the only strategy they would use. Were the interpretation of the question and the strategies used related to the approach to reading used in the classrooms?

All the children interpreted the question, "How did you learn to read?" as, "Who taught you to read?" Nearly one-half of the low achievers credited their mother as the teacher while nearly 62% of the high achievers credited the teacher. What accounts for the differences in response and why did so many of the low achievers say their mother taught them? It seems likely that

mothers of the low achievers were helping them at home, and perhaps these children didn't view the teacher as being as helpful as their mother.

Almost as many low achieving as high achieving readers said they were good readers. Why did so many of the poor readers say they were good readers? Were the poor readers unwilling to admit they couldn't read well or did they think they could read well because they could "sound out" some words? Could it be because children were not ability grouped in most of the classrooms? Since many of the low achievers will repeat first grade, will they come to see themselves as poor readers?

There were not great differences between the responses of the high and low achievers to many of the interview questions, but we do feel the children's responses to the questions revealed what they believe reading is all about. Such information could let the teacher know if the child's views were consistent with those held by the teacher and provide insight to the child's stage of development in reading. This information could then be used as a realistic basis for determining appropriate instruction.

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APPENDIX

Interview Responses

	High Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
Question 1. When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?		
"Sound it out"	20	18
"Ask someone"	9	12
"Skip the word"	0	2
Use meaning (context)	4	0
Other	1	2
	34	34
Question 2: Do you ever do anything else?		
"Sound it out"	8	10
"Ask someone"	11	7
"Skip it"	1	0
Use meaning	1	3
Other	2	7
"No"	11	7
	34	34
Question 3: Who is the best reader in your class? (Not reported because numerous students were named.)		
Question 4: What makes them a good reader?		
"He/she reads anything."	6	6
"He/she is _____", e.g. ahead, fast, reads hard books....	8	15
He/she has or does something i.e. "holds book right", is smart," "has expression."	4	1
"He/she studies more."	2	0
"I just know they are."	3	3
"I don't know."	7	6
No response	4	3
	34	34

	High Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
Question 5: Do you think they ever come to something they don't know? (If the answer was yes, they were asked what they thought the person did).		
"No, he/she never comes to a word he doesn't know."	2	13
"_____sounds it out."	10	2
"Sometimes he/she gets a little mixed up."	0	2
"_____asks the teacher."	4	8
"_____goes to another word."	1	0
"Asks me."	1	2
"Guesses."	0	1
"Same as I do."	1	0
"Don't know."	4	1
No response	11	5
	34	34
Question 6: Who is not a good reader in your class? (Not reported because numerous students were named.)		
Question 7: Why do you think _____ is not a good reader?		
He/she doesn't listen.	4	2
Answers related to things they don't do, i.e., "_____don't practice", "____ always asks questions," "_____ skips words, "____skips pages,"...	8	13
Personal opinion such as, "When I hear them read they don't_____."	7	6
Reasons such as the low level of materials, limited quantity of reading, etc.	2	0
"It's hard."	0	2
"I don't know."	3	6
No response	10	5
	34	34

	High Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
Question 8: What could you do to help them be a better reader?		
Direct them to do something, i.e. Pay attention. listen, watch, read faster.	7	6
"Sound it out."	6	4
"I'd tell them the words."	6	7
Give him something, i.e., easy words books, ...	2	4
"Let him/her read to me."	2	0
"I'd make them stay after school"	2	0
"I'd make letters."	1	0
"She don't want me to teach her."	0	1
No response	8	12
	34	34
Question 9: How did you learn to read?		
Mother	6	16
Teacher	21	13
Sibling	2	3
Self	3	2
Other	2	0
	34	34
Question 10: What did your teacher do to help you learn to read?		
Related to sounding out, i.e. Helped sound out words.	9	8
Related to the materials used, i.e. "Used _____", words on wall, on board, little books, word cards,....	4	7
Verbal help given, i.e. "Told me words," "Helped me," "Asked questions",....	4	8
"Helped me spell."	2	3
Specific activities, i.e. "Gave me homework," "Made me read books."	6	7
Statement to the effect that they already knew how to read.	5	0
"Don't know."	4	1
	34	34

	High Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
Question 11: Are you a good reader?		
"Yes."	29	24
"No. "	1	1
"Sort of" and "pretty good"	2	9
"Don't know"	2	0
	34	34
Question 12: How do you know?		
"Because I _____." (practice, listen, pay attention, ...)	10	7
"Because I learned in kindergarten."	2	0
Related to opinion, i.e., "Because _____ told me." and "I know I am."	6	6
Answers related to quality, i.e. "Because I am fast," "read hard materials," use my eyes," "use my brain."	8	3
"Because _____taught me"	0	2
"I don't know."	7	2
No response	0	11
Related reading problems such as missing words, not getting 100's on spelling....	1	3
	34	34
Question 13: Why do people read?		
Future orientation, e.g. "To sign something," "Grownups need to."	7	1
School reasons, i.e. "To learn," "To go to next grade."	11	8
"For fun."	1	2
"Don't know."	3	2
No response	12	21
	34	34